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WAR

FROM THE

CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW.

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By ERNEST H. CROSBY.

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BOSTON:
1900.

Rev. L. H. Schwab,

Jan. 30, 1901

Address at the Episcopal Church Congress at Providence, R. I., November 15, 1900, in a discussion on "War from the Christian Point of View." Papers were read upon this subject by Capt. A. T. Mahan, U. S. N., and the Rev. L. H. Schwab of New York, and a discussion followed in which the Rev. St. Clair Hester of Brooklyn, N. Y., the Rev. S. D. McConnell, D. D. of Brooklyn, N. Y., the Rev. G. R. Van DeWater, D. D., late Chaplain of the 71st Regiment in Cuba, and the Rt. Rev. A. C. A. Hall, D. D., Bishop of Vermont, took part, the Rt. Rev. Wm. N. McVickar, S. T. D., Bishop Coadjutor of Rhode Island, in the chair.

War from the Christian Point of View.

If thou detestest war, as all men should,
Make monumental thine antipathy:
Intoxicate thyself with loathing of it;
Give policy's least mood of protean guile
No quarter. Sound one note, and vary it not,
While tumults of insidious "ifs" and "thoughs,"
Like locust legions, loudening as they swell,
Would buzz and hiss thee mute.

— *Edgar Fawcett.*

Do you recall the wave of horror that passed over not only this country, but the whole civilized world last summer, at the news of the burning of the German ships at Hoboken? The account of the agony and death of the imprisoned victims was almost too frightful to read. Again last month we shuddered at the report of the Warren Street explosions in New York. We are horrified at these things, and yet we Christians are taking an active and voluntary part in the production of just such explosions and conflagrations. Here is a picture of one of them drawn by a newspaper correspondent:

"Amid the thrashing machinery the dead were thick. The plunging beams racked and crushed the dead and dying. In the basement of this inferno firemen — some of them were still alive — writhed amid the furious

flames. Some were dead and the fire danced over their torn bodies, wreathing the naked shapes with fire, and giving their features a look that no human being ought to gaze upon and live."

The Church has thanked God for that, in the name of the Jesus who said, "Love your enemies," and two Christian admirals (or their friends) have been striving to wrest from each other the responsibility for this hideous scene! Nor is war on land any less horrible. Here is a view of the battlefield of the Atbara, in the Soudanese War of 1898, taken from an English journal:

"There were black spindle-legs curled up to meet regimbleted black faces, donkeys headless and legless or sieves of shrapnel, camels with necks writhed back on to their humps rotting already in pools of blood and bile-yellow water, heads without faces and faces without anything below, cobwebbed arms and legs and black skins grilled to crackling on smoldering palm leaf."

This is an example of Christian influence in a Mohammedan country, the result of a ferocity of which the poor donkeys and camels would have been incapable. If Jesus had said, "Blessed are the war makers," and "Hate your enemies," what better way could his followers have found to carry out his injunctions?

But, after all, these are only external things. They are the outward and visible signs of a still greater inward and spiritual horror. War means hate. If any two of us — I do not care who — should determine now at this very moment to hack or squeeze the life out of each other, we should at once, as we fell upon each other, begin to hate with a deadly, relentless hatred. Every

battle gives proof of this fact. In the affair of the "Winslow," for instance, early in the Cuban War, when a Spanish bombshell exploded on the deck of one of our gunboats, a war correspondent tells us that the men "became frantic and cursed and yelled." Lieutenant Mead adds that "the spectacle seemed to drive them crazy with the desire of banging the Spaniards off the earth." In the famous charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman we have the same cursing and swearing, the men insisting with oaths on being led back to wreak vengeance on the enemy. The brother of General Howard of our army reports that a Christian soldier said to him (Was it General Howard himself?), "I cannot bear to go into the presence of God so angry as I always become in battle." What are we to think of the distinguished British colonel in South Africa, a favorite in the highest society and head of a crack regiment, who, when he was wounded, sat up propped against a tree and shouted out to his men to "exterminate the vermin"? or of General Baden-Powell, the only "hero" that England has been able to extract from her inglorious Transvaal War, who, in his recent book on "Scouting," says that "man-hunting" is a better game than foot-ball? or of the term "pig-sticking," now commonly applied in Great Britain to a bayonet charge? Here is an extract from the letter of an English officer printed in the London *Times*, the organ of respectability and aristocracy and religion:

"After the enemy was driven out, one of our squadrons pursued and got right in among them in the twilight, and most excellent pig-sticking ensued for about ten minutes, the bag being about sixty."

Rudyard Kipling is the poet laureate of brute force, but he has the realistic genius which faithfully shows the loathsome characteristics of the object of his admiration. In his poem on the "Torpedo" he speaks of the "hate that backs the hand" which sends the missile on its errand of destruction. That is a line of luminous insight. What but hate could send forth such a sinister monster, the fell amphibious reptile of machines? In his "Drums of the Fore and Aft" Kipling speaks out even more plainly and distinctly. "You must employ," he says, "either blackguards or gentlemen to do butchers' work with efficiency." War is "butchers' work" then, in the words of its chief champion, and the blackguard shares with the gentleman a special aptitude for it. It is hardly to be supposed that the blackguard becomes a gentleman on the battlefield: we must conclude therefore that the gentleman becomes a blackguard. And that this is the case we are assured by a recent letter from a war correspondent in South Africa copied from an English newspaper in the *New York Times;* and he tells us incidentally that he has passed his entire life among soldiers. Here are his words:

"War raises to the surface the worst passions and vices of men, and whoever expects soldiers, whether they be English, French, Germans or Boers, to act in the heat of battle as a gentleman would act in a London drawing room, has very little knowledge of the ferocity latent in human nature. When life and death are the stakes for which men play, chivalry and mercy are easily forgotten, and the original savage reappears, not much changed from the primeval time."

It is the "original savage" then that we are asked to

resuscitate within us in the name of Christ! And this savage spirit, of which I have given such abundant proof, is not a mere separable incident of war,— an abuse of war that could be eliminated,— but the essential spirit of war. There could be no war without it. One of our volunteer colonels in Cuba summed up the whole situation in a few words, when in a skirmish before Santiago he called upon his troops to "give the Spaniards hell!" I do not blame the words: any one — a bishop — might have used them under the same circumstances; but we as Christians, as a church, have no business to sanction such circumstances.

Yes, war is hell, as General Sherman long ago told us, but he did not go on to tell us why. There is only one possible reason. Hell is not a geographical term; it is merely the expression of the spiritual condition of its inhabitants. War is hell because it transforms men into devils. And how naturally the terminology of hell accommodates itself to it! In different columns of a single copy of the *New York Herald*, describing, I think, different engagements, I read that the soldiers "fought like demons," and "yelled like fiends." It is all so natural that probably no one noticed it but myself. And so we found in the case of the burning Spanish ship the word "inferno" seemed the most appropriate.

War is hate. Christianity is love. On which side should the Church be ranged?

War is hell. The Church is, or ought to be, the Kingdom of Heaven. What possible truce can there be between them?

And yet it is a fact that the Church favors war. Can

you recall a single sermon condemning war, or even severely critical of it? A great movement against war has been going on in England during the past two years. I find among its leaders Frederick Harrison, the positivist, Herbert Spencer, the agnostic, and John Morley, the atheist, but the whole bench of bishops has been on the side of bloodshed. In France the Church has given its unanimous support to the military conspiracy against Dreyfus, and left it to the free-thinking Zola to show "what Jesus would do." In Germany and Russia the Church is the mainstay of military despotism. Is it true that things are so very different in this country? We have seen a great campaign conducted against war here since 1898. Has not the vastly preponderating influence in the Church been exerted against peace, with only here and there a lonely voice in its favor? Has a single religious newspaper opposed warfare?

Perhaps my own experience will have some interest for you. I have frequently spoken in behalf of peace during the past two years, and have tried to base my arguments on what seemed to me to be the highest Christian principles. You will be surprised to learn that the "common people," as a rule, hear this message gladly. If you address a miscellaneous audience at the Cooper Institute in New York, for instance,— an audience of some fifteen hundred, composed neither of blackguards nor gentlemen,— and tell them, as I have, that war is a relic of barbarism which has no business to show itself at the end of the nineteenth century, they will cheer you to the echo, and scarcely a man will be found to make a protest. I have also spoken

to audiences of educated Christians and I have found them cold. Only once were my hearers unanimous against me without an exception, and that was when I was invited to address a meeting of Protestant ministers. Even Captain Mahan admits that there have been such things as bad wars. Can any of you remember one so iniquitous that the Church did not give it her blessing? I am driven reluctantly to a conclusion which I only express here under a grave sense of duty, and that is that the churches are the chief strongholds in Christendom of the spirit of warfare.

Is it strange, then, that outsiders should criticise us? A Japanese writer, Matsumura Kaiseki, uses this language in a recent article: "To the oriental Christian there seems to be something absolutely contradictory in the Gospel preached by the missionaries and the action of their governments." And the eminent Jew, Max Nordau, is surprised to find that "The Church does not seem to see that it is blasphemy to ask of the God of love to look with favor upon murder and destruction." May we not have something to learn from Jew and Gentile?

This backwardness of the Church to do the work of Christ, while those beyond the pale are endeavoring to accomplish it, has a precise analogy in the history of the anti-slavery movement. It was such "infidels" as Garrison and Phillips that were fulfilling the obligations of the Church fifty years ago, while she was searching the Scriptures to find authority for a sin which the world had outgrown. War is going to be condemned by the conscience of the world just as surely as slavery was condemned. I do not say that wars will cease. Murder

and theft have not ceased, and they are condemned by mankind. But I do say that war will be adjudged a crime, like other murders and robberies, and that those who take part in it will know that they are doing wrong. The only question is, What instrument will God use in bringing this about? Shall we allow him to use the Church, or shall we ask him to look for other agents? It is because I believe the Church may still be persuaded to volunteer for this great task that I am here to-night. Why was not the Church — why was not our church — at the head of the movement to free the slaves; and why is she not to-day at the head of those who proscribe war as a survival of barbaric times?

This matter of war is not to be settled by passing resolutions nor by enacting a new commandment with its "Thou shalt not." What is the teaching of Jesus? "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." I know that he meant those words literally because they appeal to what is deepest in my being. Search into your innermost hearts and see if you do not find the truth of these words attested there. The cure for war lies in the legacy of love which Christ left to us, of boundless love for the Father and of boundless love for our fellow-men. We cannot love men with bombshells. May not the Church inspire in its members such a love for men — for Filipinos and Boers and all other men — that it will be impossible for them even to think of such a thing as thrusting a bayonet into another's breast or slashing his face with a sabre? This does not seem to me an unattainable ideal. All that we need to

do is to become as little children and look at war afresh, free from all the prejudices that a perverted education has rooted in us. We condemn arson, adultery, murder, burglary, lying and theft. War includes them all, and in a form more exaggerated, more self-evidently wrong, than any one of them taken alone. War repeals the Ten Commandments and explicitly places a portion of the human race outside the universal obligation of Christian love.

Every age has had its barbarisms. We wonder now at slavery, at the hanging of boys for stealing a shilling, at imprisonment for debt, at the torture of witnesses, at the rack and thumbscrew and stake. All these things were supported by Christians and the Church. Are we to suppose that our age is the first without sanctified barbarisms? And if not, what barbarism of the day is so conspicuous as war? No, it is an awful hallucination, a fatal delusion, that war can be Christian. Let us fill our hearts with love and look forth upon our enemies, if we have enemies, with that love, and we shall see clearly that a Christian war is as impossible as a Christian murder.